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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, January 27 1931

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Home Comfort in Mid-Winter."

Bulletin available: "Operating a Home Heating Plant."

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Uncle Ebenezer had a broad grin on his face and was chuckling, yes, chuckling loud enough to be heard from the kitchen, when he came in last night. When Uncle Ebenezer really is amused he doesn't mind letting his family know it.

We all wanted to hear the joke and he was just as anxious to tell it.

"Look here, what I found in the paper this week. A poem about a furnace that does my heart good."

"Furnaces don't belong in real poetry," said Betty Jane, disapprovingly.

"Well, verses about moonlight and lilies and that sort of thing may suit you, Betty Jane, but I'll choose those on a sensible practical subject any day. Let me read this and see if you don't like it. It is called Winter Woes.

"Of all the ills with which I'm cursed
The winter furnace is the worst.
On balmy days it rolls up heat
But balks on days of cold and sleet.
And ever when my wife complains
I do not take sufficient pains
Nor use my substitute for brains,
Once more the furnace mouth I stoke,
Once more the iron bar I poke
Among the cinders, ash and coke.
I bend my frame at its equator
And operate the agitator.
I get the ash, it's very true,
But half the fire comes following through.
Then when my strength is quite expended
I find the grate is end for ended.
There's nothing in the world to do
But clean it out and start anew.

In vain my weary eyes I raise
No snappy kindling meets my gaze.
Jim Jones, from whom I ordered wood,
Has failed to function as he should.
That wretched furnace is the reason
I so lament the vanished season
When every gent had B.V.D.'s on,
When summer birdies lifted lilts
And folks could sleep without their quilts.'

"There," said Uncle Ebenezer, "wouldn't that verse do anyone good who had been wresting with cantankerous, temperamental house furnaces for more winters than he likes to remember?"

"Speaking of misbehaving furnaces," I said, "my Next-Door Neighbor has been struggling with hers the last day or two and I told her I was sure you'd go over and give her some advice when you came home tonight. I told her I didn't want to boast about my own relatives but I did think you knew more about furnaces than any man in this town."

"Hum," said Uncle Ebenezer, "It's very nice of you to say such flattering things about me, Aunt Sammy. I will say that few men have had more bitter experiences dealing with furnaces than I. What seems to be the trouble next door?"

"My Neighbor says the house doesn't get warm enough for comfort, though she piles on coal all day."

Uncle Ebenezer shook his head. "That's just the way it goes," he said. "Lots of money escapes up the chimney because people don't know how to run their furnaces correctly. I found that out long ago. To warm a house at low cost you must understand your heater and use it intelligently. The average house owner burns too much coal, principally because he doesn't know how to regulate his heater to make it follow the changes in outside temperature. The heat locked up in every pound of coal can be extracted without wasting fuel, either up the chimney or in the ash barrel."

"Wouldn't that bulletin about furnaces be helpful to my neighbor and other people struggling to heat their houses?"

"An excellent booklet," said Uncle Ebenezer. "If I had had it early in my life it would have probably saved me several gray hairs and unnecessary coal bills. I'll take it with me when I go next door after dinner to see about that furnace."

Uncle Ebenezer had a lot to tell my neighbor about regulating dampers, but all his explanations are to be found in the bulletin he mentioned, which is called "Operating a Home Heating Plant." A very handy bulletin to have on your shelves, by the way.

The fire next door was entirely out when we got there, so I had an opportunity to watch the process of building a furnace fire correctly. First Uncle Ebenezer placed light material, like paper and excelsior, in the fire-

pot; next he laid on kindlings and then a little heavier wood. He opened the draft damper wide, closed the check and feed-door dampers, and set the smoke-pipe damper so that the wood fire would burn briskly but not too fast. Then he set a match to the paper, and when the fire was burning thoroughly all over, he threw on coal, spreading it well over the mass of wood.

"Not too much coal at a time," cautioned Uncle Ebenezer. "If blue flames spout up over the coal when the feed door is opened, then open the feed-door damper to admit additional air to burn the gases that are being given off from the coal. When these blue flames disappear, close the feed-door damper and let the fire burn until the temperature of the house is about right. Then close the draft damper--or almost close it-- and open the check damper until the fire seems to stand still.

"It pays to experiment with your own furnace to see how far each of the two dampers should be opened to hold the fire so that the desired heat is kept in the rooms all over the house," suggested Uncle Ebenezer.

"How should the fire be fixed for the night?" my neighbor asked.

"First throw on fresh coal or bank the cinders, then close the check damper and open the draft damper long enough for the fire to stop giving off gases. You will know that the gases have disappeared when the blue flames over the coals have disappeared. Then close the draft damper, open the check and feed-door dampers, and say good night to the furnace."

According to Uncle Ebenezer, furnaces are like babies when it comes to proper care. They should be fed and looked after at regular intervals, instead of waiting until they begin to misbehave because of hunger or neglect. Three times a day, he thinks should be sufficient for putting on coal and twice for shaking.

When the fire seemed to be progressing we went upstairs and were treated to cocoa and spice cake. But Uncle Ebenezer's mind was still on furnaces.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that it takes more than heat to make a house comfortable in winter. Three things are needed--proper temperature, humidity and circulation of air. Many physicians say that colds and throat ills are often the result of living in over-heated, rooms where the air is as dry as that over the Desert of Sahara. For comfort and health, most people need less heat and more moisture in the air they breathe. A good temperature is about 67 degrees F.

"What about this circulation of air you mentioned. I thought moving air made people chilly, not comfortable. I've always been worried about the drafts coming in at all these windows and doors."

"The happy medium is what makes comfort. Close stuffy rooms where no air is moving cause headaches and discomfort, but, of course, too much movement, especially of cold air, creates a draft and makes us cold. I advise weather stripping or storm windows for all windows. It may cost a little extra, but you'll save the cost on coal bills, and it will prevent the warm air from leaking out and the cold air from getting in. However, a little of this outside air helps prevent stagnant air inside. Fireplaces also help the ventilation and circulation in a room, especially when a fire is burning."

"May I ask one more question?" said my neighbor. "How can cold uncomfortable floors be prevented?"

"A cellar, especially a warm cellar helps. Lacking that, some insulating material like plaster may be put between the two floors. Since hot air rises and cold air sinks, our feet, in winter, are very likely to be kept cold and our heads hot. Some experts advise putting in low radiators that constantly send out the heat near the floor."

Tomorrow: "Healthful Sleep for the Youngest."

